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US redefines turf on security matters

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WASHINGTON - A war game exercise last week with unusually high-level players at the White House had just reached the point where the Soviets had made first use of tactical nuclear weapons in the North Atlantic.

Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, sitting in as an observer, rose at that point, headed for the door and declared: "This is getting pretty dicey. I think I'll go upstairs and tell the President I'm in charge."

The roomful of generals and senior officials broke up.

The anecdote was recounted by someone who was there to illustrate that Haig has a keen, self-deprecating sense of humor. After all, he had been the butt of criticism and derision when, following the shooting of Ronald Reagan, he suddenly materialized before television cameras in the White House press room to assure the nation that all was well, that he was in charge.

But the war game anecdote bespeaks much more. Significant changes are under way in the way national security policy is being made in the Reagan Administration. It remains to be seen to what extent the personal and policy rivalry between Haig and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger will be reined in and harnessed into a more traditional, orderly decision-making process.

By all accounts, the initial setup, under presidential counselor Edwin Meese 3d and national security adviser Richard Allen, simply did not work. The initial concept was to de-emphasize the role of the National Security Council in favor of "Cabinet government."

But Meese was neither experienced nor particularly interested in foreign and military policy; he is said to have hung back from promptly bringing issues to the President for fear he wouldn't be able to adequately answer detailed questions. And Allen got caught in a struggle over turf involving both Haig and Weinberger.

One result was that during Reagan's first year in office there was never formalized a procedure over the role the National Security Council would play in shaping options for presidential decisions. It wasn't long before Haig and Weinberger simply went around the NSC, either through White House chief of staff James Baker 3d or directly to the President. At other times they worked out their differences between them and informed the White House what they intended to do.

With the assignment of Deputy Secretary of State William Clark to the post of national security adviser, all that is changing. A longtime friend and adviser to Reagan, Clark is reorganizing procedures and placing the NSC staff back into a central role in formulating policy options.

For example, Clark issued NSSD-1/82 (National Security Study Document No. 1, 1982) representing the first attempt by the Administration - a year and a quarter in - to formulate an overall national security framework to govern relations with the Soviet Union, China, the Mideast, Africa, Latin America, Asia.

This is but the first of several NSC studies recently ordered, some of which will be chaired by NSC officials, others by State, Defense and other officials, but always with an NSC staffer present to take the official notes. Heretofore NSC people often were not even invited to be present at interagency policy meetings.

Role of the war game

The war game is another example of the changes taking place. Thomas Reed, a former Air Force secretary during the Ford Administration with an extensive political relationship with both Reagan and Clark, was brought in by the new national security adviser to help organize the defense cluster at the NSC and to help educate both Reagan and Clark on key defense policy issues.

Well-placed sources say that Reed urged the President not only to sanction the holding of a major war game at the White House, proposed months earlier by the Pentagon, but also to take a direct interest in the week-long play in order to help educate himself on crisis management.

William Rogers, Secretary of State during Richard Nixon's first term, was recruited to act as "President" in the war game. He was asked to brief Reagan at least once a day on what issues arose, the options that were considered and the decisions made.

When the bureaucracy discovered that Reagan was to take so unprecedented an interest, very senior officials decided they, too, would participate. Filling the role of Secretary of State was Walter Stoessel, the deputy secretary of state; Fred Ikle, the undersecretary of defense, played his boss; Reed was the NSC adviser.

And people such as Haig dropped by from time to time to watch the unfolding drama.

By insinuating the NSC back into its traditional role of coordinating policy choices, Clark has taken a major step toward discouraging end runs by Haig or Weinberger.

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In addition, he has directed that all future trips abroad by senior officials of all agencies be cleared in advance by the NSC, so that policy guidance can be coordinated. And the Pentagon can no longer inform foreign governments on possible availability of major weapons systems until the NSC has had a chance to consider whether that would be advisable.

There was considerable annoyance in Washington over press reports that Weinberger had informed King Hussein of Jordan that F16 jet fighters and improved Hawk air-defense missiles might be available, especially if he would reconsider his decision to buy air-defense missiles from the Soviets.

Pentagon officials insist the stories were skewed. In fact, they say privately, although Weinberger explored what it might take to convince Hussein to back out of the Soviet deal, he made no promises. "He didn't want to give Hussein the idea Jordan was considered a second-class nation and absolutely couldn't have the F16," one official said. "But Weinberger hoped the king could be talked into considering a less sophisticated jet, such as the F5G."

In any case, the new requirement calls for the NSC to consider the implications of even discussing possible sales beforehand - to avoid the sort of flap that developed when Israeli officials reacting strongly to the press accounts.

State, Defense rivalry

Following the Jordan affair a slew of news stories have blossomed on the competition between the secretaries of Defense and State.

There is no doubt that there are differences, though it is easy to exaggerate them.

There have always been institutional differences between the two departments. In addition, there is no love lost between the two men. Weinberger has not been bashful about offering foreign-policy pronouncements in answer to direct

questions - something resented by the turf-jealous Haig.

But at times the two have consciously played good-cop/bad-cop. Weinberger will talk tough about what ought to be done on sanctions against the Soviet Union and about pressuring the allies to go along. Then Haig will contact European foreign ministers and, pointing to pressures in Washington, try to work out some compromise. "You'd be surprised how often this has worked," one official says.

But on Central American policy, Haig has lobbied for what insiders say have been "hard-nosed military options" while Weinberger has resisted, reflecting the caution of his military advisers against taking on open-ended missions that could strain their resources and encounter unfavorable public reactions in the United States - reactions that could hurt chances for support of the expanding Defense budget.

But the President makes the decisions, and in most of the contentious decisions to date, he has been cautious. That has been true on policy judgments on Central America, Libya, the zero-option proposal on medium-range missiles in Europe and on the Soviet pipeline.

Battle over a pipeline

Weinberger has been arguing insistently that the United States do everything in its power to delay the natural gas pipeline from Siberia to Western Europe. Like Haig, he feels that if the Europeans become dependent on the Soviet Union for an important part of their energy requirements, in some future crisis the Europeans could be subject to Soviet political and/or economic blackmail.

Weinberger also is convinced that much of the \$8 billion to \$11 billion a year in hard currency that the pipeline would generate once it's fully operational would be ploughed into more sophisticated arms for the Soviet defense machine.

But Haig countered that it's too late to stop the deal, all that could be done is to delay it. Why create serious fissures within NATO on the issue when the payoff is so small?

Comments one insider: "The President finds seductive some of the arguments Weinberger offered on the pipeline because they appeal to his gut instincts. But he's also a cautious man who paid considerable attention to the arguments of the Secretary of Commerce [Malcolm Baldrige] about the long-term harmful effects on American business if too many political strings are tied to US technology sales. And that's in addition to Haig's arguments about the effect on the alliance."

"The CIA concluded we simply can't stop the pipeline. The most we can do is delay it maybe a year. For that, is it worth tearing up NATO relations and damaging our long-range export picture, which doesn't look all that hot?"

So Reagan decided to defer a judgment on whether to try to extend the ban on American exports of equipment for the pipeline to European companies making the same gear under US license - pending thorough consultations with the allies starting this week by Undersecretary of State James Buckley. Reagan decided that the principal aim of the Buckley mission should be to try to work out a long-term alliance policy on not providing loans and credits to the Soviets on concessionary terms that the allies don't offer to one another.

In addition, Buckley will explore interest in decreasing Europe's dependence on Soviet energy by providing more US coal on faster delivery schedules; more natural gas from Norway and the Netherlands and liquefied natural gas from Algeria and Nigeria.

"Clearly, that's a sensible approach which we expect will get a sympathetic reaction in Europe," one senior official declared.

As for Haig and Weinberger, aides say they are each convinced they still have time to make the clinching arguments for their quite different approaches. But on this issue at least, the smart money is on Haig.